

REMARKS

Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration. Claims 1-10, 12, 14, 15, 17-23, 25-45, 47-51, 53, 56 and 60-63 were previously pending in this application. By this amendment, claims 1, 15, 18, 26, 31 and 33-39 have been amended. Claims 21 has been canceled. As a result, claims 1-10, 12, 14, 15, 17-20, 22-23, 25-45, 47-51, 53, 56 and 60-63 are pending for examination. No new matter has been added.

Interview Summary

Applicants thank Examiner Kim for the courtesies of granting and conducting a telephone interview on April 28, 2009. Applicants were represented at the interview by Edmund J. Walsh (Reg. 32,950).

During the interview, Applicants provided an overview of the specification and proposed claim amendments. The Amendments and remarks made herein may serve as a further summary of the interview.

The Examiner agreed that the proposed amendments appeared to overcome the art of record, but that a further search may be required.

Claim Rejections 35 U.S.C. § 112

Claim 17 was rejected for reciting "items" without antecedent basis. Applicants respectfully submit that changes to claims 15 and 17 provide adequate antecedent basis for the terms in claim 17 and the rejection should be withdrawn.

Claim Rejections Based on Prior Art

Each of the claims has been rejected based on one or more prior art references. Applicants respectfully submit that each of the claims as amended recites limitations that patentably distinguish over the cited art, and the claims should be allowed.

Before discussing the claims, Applicants provide a summary of some exemplary embodiments. Briefly, the present application describes a networked system in which items, such as computers, may be admitted into clean groups. Items within the clean groups may communicate with each other (page 2, lines 13-15; page 5, lines 9-10).

Management of the clean group is based, at least in part, on self governance actions taken by the items themselves. When an item no longer qualifies for clean group membership, it removes itself from the clean group and may also notify the clean group server (page 2, lines 18-23; line 3-8).

The system is constructed to restrict access even in a distributed network where there may be many thousands of ports, such as wireless ports and Ethernet ports (page 2, lines 2-6). Items gain admission to a clean group by performing compliance checks and sending an add request to a clean group server (page 3, lines 1-4,15).

In some embodiments, the clean group may be maintained within a domain controller, which in turn specifies access to group policy objects maintained in an active directory server. One of those group policy objects may specify parameters for forming security associations, such as security associations using the IPsec protocol. By allowing only members of the clean group to access a group policy object, and using security associations according to the group policy object for communication among clean group members, communication with clean group members can be restricted to only other clean group members.

With these techniques, a clean group can be formed, even though items connected to the network will not necessarily access the network through a choke point where quarantine enforcement may be located (page 5, lines 3-14; page 2, lines 1-6). Distributed control is also provided through self governance action by the individual items. When an item determines that it no longer qualifies for clean group membership, the item may remove itself from the clean group and optionally notify the clean group server (page 4, lines 13-19). These self governance actions may include erasing or hiding credentials or otherwise invalidating the clean group membership.

The foregoing summary is provided solely for the convenience of the Examiner. However, it should be appreciated that each of the independent claims may not be limited in the manner described above. Therefore, the Examiner is requested to not rely upon the summary above for determining whether each of the claims distinguishes over the prior art of record, but to do so based solely upon the language of the claims and the arguments presented below.

Independent Claim 1

Claim 1 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102 as being anticipated by US Patent Publication 2004/0103310 (Sobel). However, Sobel does not describe a system employing clean group management as described in the present application, and claim 1 now recites limitations not shown or suggested in Sobel, including:

- managing access to a plurality of group policy objects through an active directory server, each of the group policy objects being associated with a group defined by the domain controller, and the active directory server providing access to each of the plurality of group policy objects to items based on membership in a group defined by the domain controller;
- wherein:
 - members of the clean group communicate using security associations; and
 - a group policy object of the plurality of group policy objects comprises parameters for security associations used by items of the clean group, whereby communication with items of the clean group is restricted to other items within the clean group

Rather than describing the use of a group policy object managed through an active directory server based on groups defined by a domain controller, Sobel relates to the enforcement of compliance of network security policies using a DHCP proxy to segregate compliant from non-compliant clients [0016]. The proxy intercepts requests for addresses and blocks the request from reaching the DHCP server [0023]. Sobel does not relate to a mechanism of restricting access to a clean group through the use of security associations. Nor does Sobel describe providing access to a group policy object that comprises parameters for communication used by items of the clean group.

To expedite prosecution, Applicants note that claim 1, as amended, now recites limitations similar to those previously in claim 53. Claim 53 was rejected based on Sobel in view of US Patent Application 2003/0065942 to Lineman. However, Lineman also does not describe distributed clean group management as described in the present application. Rather, Lineman describes a software program that helps a computer administrator create and manage security policies (See, Abstract). As examples of security policies, Lineman indicates data classification levels (FIG. 4A); password and user-ID construction (e.g. FIG. 4B); and minimum password length (FIG. 5A). Lineman does not describe use of policies that “comprises parameters for security associations used by items of the clean group.” Accordingly, even if Sobel and Lineman were combined, the combination would not meet this limitation of claim 1.

Moreover, Lineman describes a policy document that is distributed to computer systems in a network (see, Abstract; FIG. 2, element 78). It does not describe “managing access to a plurality of group policy objects through an active directory server,” as claimed.

The Office Action states that official notice is taken that Active Directory enables IPsec configuration for secure communications between computers. While Applicants do not dispute that Active Directory could be used for this purpose, Applicants respectfully submit that the existence of such a capability is not adequate to demonstrate that one of skill in the art knew to use the IPsec configuration in the manner claimed.

Thus, even if combined, the references would not teach all limitations of claim 1 as amended and the rejection should be withdrawn.

Independent Claim 15

Independent claim 15 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103 based on Sobel in view of U.S. Patent 7,162,649 to Ide. As should be apparent from the discussion of Sobel in connection with claim 1, above, Sobel does not describe a clean group management system as in the present application.

As understood, Ide is cited as teaching that the clean group comprises a group of computers and users. Accordingly, Ide does not cure the deficiencies of Sobel.

As amended, claim 15 contains limitations from claim 21. To expedite prosecution, Applicants comment on the rejection of claim 21. In connection with that claim, the Office Action asserts that Sobel teaches a remove message at paragraphs 21 and 24. However, the cited passages describe transmission of compliance data. They do not describe either a remove message or that the clean group server can “remove the item from the clean group in response to the remove request.” In fact, Sobel does not appear to disclose that a client determines its status such that it could send an add and a remove message.

Thus, even if combined, the references do not teach all limitations of claim 15, and the rejection should be withdrawn.

Independent Claim 26

Independent claim 26 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103 based on Sobel in view of Ide. As described above in connection with claims 1 and 15, neither Sobel nor Ide describes a system with clean group management as in the present application. Accordingly, claim 26 as amended recites limitations not shown or suggested in the references.

For example, claim 26 recites: “when the clean runtime object subsequently determines that the computer does not have the specified set of properties, performs self governance actions that disable the computer from communication with the clean group.” As noted above, Sobel describes a system in which a DHCP proxy intercepts a request for a network address. If the request is from an unacceptable client, the client does not receive an address. There is no teaching of self governance actions performed by a client computer. Thus, even if combined, the references do not teach at least this limitation, and the rejection should be withdrawn.

Independent Claim 33

Claim 33 is rejected as anticipated by Sobel. However, independent claim 33 as amended contains limitations that clearly distinguish over the references. For example, claim 33 recites: "when the computer is a member of a clean group and it is determined that the computer does not have the specified set of properties, performing self governance action, the self governance action comprising at least one of erasing domain credentials, hiding domain credentials, hiding EFS keys or disabling EFS keys."

For reasons that should be apparent from the discussion of the Sobel, above, Sobel does not recognize the possibility of self governance action as claimed. Rather, Sobel describes compliance enforcement with a DHCP proxy server. Thus, claim 33 patentably distinguishes over the cited references, and should be allowed.

Independent Claim 39

Claim 39 was rejected as obvious over Sobel in view of Lineman. However, as amended, claim 39 contains limitations not taught by either reference. For reasons that should be clear from the foregoing discussion of Sobel and Lineman, the references do not show or suggest limitations such as: "selectively providing access to a collection of IPSec communication requirements and parameters based on membership in the clean group maintained by the domain controller;" or "blocking access to the collection of IPSec communication requirements and parameters by items not within the clean group;" or "limiting communicating among items in the clean group to communication using the IPsec communication requirements, thereby quarantining items outside the clean group." Accordingly, claim 39 as amended patentably distinguishes over the cited references, and the rejection should be withdrawn.

General Comments on Dependent Claims

The remaining claims depend, directly or indirectly from one of independent claims 1, 15, 26, 33 or 39.

Each of the dependent claims depends from a base claim that is believed to be in condition for allowance, and Applicants believe that it is unnecessary at this time to argue the allowability of each of the dependent claims individually. Applicants do not, however, necessarily concur with the interpretation of the dependent claims as set forth in the Office Action, nor do Applicants concur that the basis for the rejection of any of the dependent claims is proper. Therefore, Applicants reserve the right to specifically address the patentability of the dependent claims in the future, if deemed necessary.

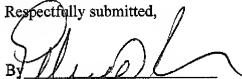
CONCLUSION

A Notice of Allowance is respectfully requested. The Examiner is requested to call the undersigned at the telephone number listed below if this communication does not place the case in condition for allowance.

If this response is not considered timely filed and if a request for an extension of time is otherwise absent, Applicant hereby requests any necessary extension of time. If there is a fee occasioned by this response, including an extension fee, the Director is hereby authorized to charge any deficiency or credit any overpayment in the fees filed, asserted to be filed or which should have been filed herewith to our Deposit Account No. 23/2825, under Docket No. M1103.70609US00.

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Respectfully submitted,



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